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Northern District of Illinois

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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California Drug Trafficker Sentenced to 35 Years in Federal Prison for Transporting Heroin and Cocaine to Chicago Aboard Amtrak Trains

CHICAGO — A federal judge has sentenced a California man to 35 years in prison for overseeing an international drug-trafficking organization that used Amtrak trains to ship heroin and cocaine to Chicago from Los Angeles.

EDGAR ROQUE, 32, of Paramount, Calif., was the leader of an extensive network of drug dealers that moved thousands of kilograms of narcotics aboard the trains from 2010 to 2016. At his direction, hundreds of packages were shipped from California to Chicago, St. Louis and elsewhere, each carrying at least three kilograms of cocaine and sometimes significantly more. Roque worked with an insider at Amtrak to facilitate the shipments and avoid detection by law enforcement.

Roque pleaded guilty earlier this year to drug and money laundering charges. U.S. District Judge Virginia M. Kendall imposed the sentence Tuesday in federal court in Chicago.

The sentence was announced by John R. Lausch, Jr., United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Brian McKnight, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Field Division of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; and Gabriel L. Grchan, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago office of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division. Substantial assistance was provided by the Amtrak Inspector General's Office and the Amtrak Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Paul H. Tzur and Kavitha Babu represent the government.

"This is criminal conduct of the worst kind," Mr. Tzur argued in the government's sentencing memorandum. "Edgar Roque's leadership role directing the mass movement of heroin and cocaine into the Chicago area and elsewhere showed that he had absolutely no regard for the safety and well-being of addicts and the communities into which he delivered the drugs."

Authorities uncovered Edgar Roque's drug-trafficking operation through a multi-year investigation dubbed "Operation Derailed." The investigation was conducted under the umbrella of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, a partnership between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The principal mission of OCDETF is to identify, disrupt and dismantle the most serious drug trafficking and money laundering organizations.

Edgar Roque was personally responsible for importing the drugs from Mexico into California via multiple cartel-level suppliers. His organization involved more than a dozen people in California, Illinois and elsewhere. After picking up the drugs at Union Station in Chicago, the group stored the narcotics at stash houses, including a home in the Gage Park neighborhood of Chicago and an apartment in northwest suburban Streamwood. After selling the drugs throughout the Chicago area, Edgar Roque or members of his crew periodically flew west on commercial airlines with the cash proceeds, often carrying \$150,000 per person.

More than 20 defendants were charged during the investigation, and several have pleaded guilty to their roles in Edgar Roque's organization. PHILLIP DIAZ, of Paramount, Calif., ensured delivery of narcotics and maintained bank accounts to launder drug proceeds. Judge Kendall on Tuesday sentenced Phillip Diaz to 20 years and ten months in prison. ANTHONY KOON, of Pueblo, Colo., delivered nearly 20 kilograms of heroin – with a wholesale value of at least \$1 million – to the Chicago area in August 2014. Judge Kendall previously sentenced Koon to nine years in prison. GERARDO SANCHEZ, of Los Angeles, Calif., helped launder drug proceeds through various bank accounts, and he accepted delivery of Koon's heroin in a hotel room in Tinley Park. Judge Kendall previously sentenced Sanchez to 17 and a half years in prison. JORGE LUIS OCHOA-CANELA, of Paramount, Calif., helped move hundreds of thousands of dollars of drug proceeds back to drug suppliers. Judge Kendall previously sentenced Ochoa-Canela to five years and ten months in prison. An Amtrak employee, ROY J. GRIFFIN, of Calumet City, admitted scheming to steal a package of cocaine that had arrived at Union Station in Chicago. U.S. District Judge Andrea R. Wood previously sentenced Griffin to 18 months in prison.

Defendants who have pleaded guilty and are awaiting sentencing include RICHARD ROQUE, of Paramount, Calif. (scheduled to be sentenced on Sept. 27, 2018); ANGELICA CERVANTES, of Chicago (Nov. 19, 2018); JUAN J. CERVANTES, of Chicago (Nov. 21, 2018); and OMAR RAMIREZ, of Compton, Calif. (Dec. 18, 2018).

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Drug Trafficking
Public Corruption

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